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ABSTRACT

Very little research literature exists on organizational change and resistance in student services. In this study six community colleges were selected with two from each of the three size of population categories: small (1,000-2,999), medium (3,000-8,999), and large (9,000 and above). In each size category two institutions were matched, one reported to have adapted and one reported to have not adapted services to meet adult needs. Adaptation was defined as conduct which alters the status quo to meet emerging needs, in this case changes in program delivery to meet the needs of adult learners. A further assessment was done by approximately 60 adult learners surveyed in the classroom at each institution. The results indicated that, in the adaptive student services organizations, change and/or new ideas were viewed as coming from a number of places within the institution, i.e., "bottom up" and/or "top down." Staff members themselves felt they had opportunities for input and morale was high. In the non-adaptive institutions there was less uniformity of opinion about the current situation. High-level administrators viewed the staff as being resistant to change and having low morale. A feeling existed in these institutions that there was not enough staff, money, or commitment to student services or professional development. (Proposed solutions for problems in the areas of organizational models, staff, student activities, and placement are described.) (ABL)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND ADULT NEEDS: ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS, MODELS, CHANGE STRATEGIES

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the April 1988 report from the League for Innovation in the community college celebrating their 20th anniversary, various innovations over the years were discussed. It is a true comment on the state of student services in community colleges that approximately 1 1/2 pages of the entire 65 page monograph were devoted to innovative programs in student services. This, endorsed by an individual who spent a great part of his career writing about student development. It is not so much an indictment of the report but of the state of student services in the community colleges.

In beginning my research on organizational change and resistance in student services, I looked for a body of literature on student services for adult learners. Very little exists. The student services literature itself is primarily comprised of isolated reports of institution-specific programs largely unsupported by broader concepts which would make them applicable to other institutions.

This is not to say that isolated innovative programs do not exist. They do. For example, successful support groups for adult returning students, active cocurricular groups, organizational structure and services designed around the concept of student goals are currently in operation on some two-year college campuses. However, they have not been documented with ongoing research and evaluation or marketed outside institutions as viable

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alternatives to existing service structures. I will focus in this presentation on the characteristics of innovative student services organizations, evidence of which is found in the case studies, then describe several cogent problem areas and finally develop some alternative solutions for improvement of student services (i.e. innovation) in the future.

II. RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

A sample of six community colleges from the State of Michigan was selected; two from each size category - small (1000 - 2999), Medium (3000 - 8999), and large (9000 and above.) In each size category, two institutions were matched, one reported to have adapted and one reported to have not adapted services to meet adult needs. Adaptation was defined as conduct which alters the status quo to meet emerging needs - in this case - changes in program delivery to meet the needs of adult learners.

The study was conducted in two stages. Stage I consisted of institutional visits. Interviews were held with the President, the Vice President of Student Services and/or Dean of Student Services, a director of a student services area and a student services staff member. Interviews were designed to cover perceptions and motivational aspects of organizational change which could not be obtained within the confines of a written instrument.

Stage II consisted of two written surveys, one given to student services directors and staff and the other to students. The student services staff were in the functional areas of: admissions, financial aid, counseling and academic advising, student activities, and career development and placement. The questions were designed to tap staff background and experience, their perceptions of institutional rewards, work climate and openness to and the process of change.

A further assessment was done by approximately 60 adult learners surveyed in the classroom at each institution. The instrument used was Mangano and Corrado's "Student Satisfaction Scale," which assesses students' knowledge of and satisfaction with student services.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF INNOVATIVE STUDENT SERVICES ORGANIZATIONS

Certain key change variables were selected from the literature specifically Zaltman and Duncan and Creamer and Creamer's work and from experience to be utilized in the research as a framework for study.

Leadership / Support

In the innovative organization, the President has set clear expectations in terms of goals and support. He/she has established an atmosphere of openness and willingness to change at the institution. New ideas, justification for them and subsequent implementation are encouraged and supported with adequate staff and finances. Specific personnel are held accountable and commitment is demonstrated through support beyond the initial start-up costs of the project.

For example, the departmental goals statement clearly outlines responsibilities in terms of specific services for adults. A staff member(s) in a particular area has been designated through contract and/or job description to be responsible for adult services. Adequate resources in terms of personnel and finances to support projects have been provided to the department. Accountability and having demonstrated institutional commitment are key to the implementation of a project.

Organizational Climate for Change

The organizational climate for change focuses on staff members' perception of change, as defined by perception of need for change and openness to change. The need for change is defined as the perception by student services personnel about how necessary it is to

change. The openness to change focuses on the perception of student services personnel about the willingness of their colleagues to change.

In the innovative organization, student services personnel recognize the need for change and perceive their colleagues are willing to change. This perception has direct impact on staff even attempting to try a new idea or program.

Education and Expertise of Personnel

In terms of staff members in an innovative organization, the majority of the staff's educational background would be in higher education, student personnel, or adult development, with advanced degrees recently achieved (within the last 10 years.) Staff may also demonstrate a commitment to education by participating in professional development activities such as in their professional field and on a broader state or national basis. The demonstration of an ongoing commitment to learning and/or a relatively recent exposure to new ideas illustrates a willingness to learn and change.

Reward Sturcture

The staff members who develop new programs perceive that institutional rewards do exist. These rewards are in terms of verbal or written praise from colleagues, supervisors or students, opportunities to expand their program area or job advancement. The fact that the institution recognizes job achievement leads to higher morale and a willingness among staff to try new programs.

IV. CASE STUDY RESULTS

These characteristics of innovative organizations seem to be substantiated by the case study results. Several common themes are apparent in adaptive and non-adaptive organizations which are highlighted in the initial case study results.

In the adaptive student services organizations change and/or new ideas are viewed as coming from a number of places within the institution - i.e. bottom up and/or top down. Staff members feel there is an openness to new ideas among their colleagues. For example, a staff member may propose a change in a publication, draft it, receive approval and have it published.

The staff members themselves feel they have opportunities for input and morale is high. They state there is an emphasis on professional development as evidenced by institutional recognition and resources for projects or development activities.

One President described one of the emphases at the institution as "understanding staff strengths and weaknesses" and then actively working on developing the strengths while minimizing the weaknesses. This may mean professional development activities and what is now taking place - a reorganization of staff and structure. Staff members are regularly sent to state institutes and national conferences and reports from these opportunities are shared with staff. Student services itself has been recently reorganized using a matrix type of model, where staff working together on committees report functionally to different supervisors.

In the non-adaptive institutions there is less uniformity of opinion about the current situation. High-level administrators view the staff as being resistant to change and having low morale. Staff view change as being "handed down" from above and there is a lack of

understanding about job roles. A feeling pervades these institutions that there is not enough staff, money or commitment to student services or professional development.

For example one Vice President stated that part of the problem is that the staff is used to a "one college employer" meaning it is the only college for which they have ever worked. The President stated that we "rely on new people to keep the energy going and influence old staff" - yet there are few new people at the institution. A director states the case as having a mandate from the President to increase enrollment, yet having received no resources to have some basic recruitment tools such as a van to bring people to campus or control over recruitment publications.

V. AREAS OF CONCERN

While these characteristics describe the ideal innovative student services organization, and the case studies illustrate specifics, problems do exist in the way programs are currently being implemented. These problems in student services range from the basics such as not having evening or weekend office hours for students to more complicated issues in personnel and organizational structure.

Organizational Model

Perhaps the overriding concern is a lack of an integrated approach to student services delivery systems. One can point easily to isolated areas or programs at an institution which have effective services. Yet it is extreme. ly difficult to find a student services unit that has an overall model of delivery that meets student needs. Rather than a cohesive approach, it is one done by departments working in isolation from each other.

One of the problems in delivering this approach or organizing such a model is a lack of understanding of the student.

Student Needs

At the heart of all student services is the student. Yet we do not know who this student is, especially when we are not discussing the traditional student. We can describe his/her needs, yet when it comes to institutional profiles of students, following through with programs to meet these needs, we often fall short. One adult student described her life at a community college as "like a bag lady" with all the offices closed at night or on weekends and no place to go to put her belongings or to study between classes.

We have not yet done a careful assessment of the multiple role demands on part-time students, commuters, and/or adult learners. We are locked into the residential model of student services who serves a "captive" audience of traditional full-time students. This delivery system is clearly not meeting the needs of those we serve.

This problem is perpetuated at the VP level in student services.

Student Services - VPs - Leadership

In looking at the leadership component, student services often appears to receive top level leadership from the President rather than the VP. Often times the VP has come up the ranks or is moved from another area and gets the student services position by default. A clear direction or initiative is lacking from the chief student services officer. The chief student services officer does not market successful programs by speaking at conferences or by publishing or doing research - or designating someone to fulfill this function. This does not mean they are necessarily poor managers, however they are not providing the goals or directions necessary from an innovative leader.

Student Services Staff

Lack of top-level leadership or initiative filters down to student services staff.

We as student services personnel generally have not been trained as researchers. We may be accustomed to having to justify our existence in conversations with faculty but have not had to quantify our work. This skill will be necessary in the future if certain areas are to survive. We must learn to be able to keep basic statistics such as how many students we see each day, type of contact, follow-up and more long-range information on retention, where

students go when they leave upon graduation or take a job or simply finish a course. We will be increasingly called on to be held accountable.

This can be done in a proactive rather than defensive manner by keeping documentation and doing basic departmental research which can be easily accessed.

VI. SOLUTIONS

These are several of the current problems, one could mention others, but I would like to conclude with some proposed solutions.

Organizational Models

Various organizational models have been proposed through the years from the residential model to Deegan's matrix model of overlapping functional responsibilities. the latest model in Schlossberg and Chickering's new book *Improving Higher Education Environments for Adults*, is one of entering educational services (admissions,) supportive services (such as union, family care, supportive center) and culminating services (placement.)

What these models do have in common is the recognition of a different set of needs from those of residential students. What has to be done is a careful assessment of the multiple roles of students and their needs and then be willing to take some risks in program delivery based on careful assessment.

It may be fine to say these changes could be easily implemented if we were starting with a brand-new community college and did not have to deal with existing structures and personnel. Structures and reporting lines can be changed, however, personnel changes are a much more difficult issue.

Staff

I would offer several suggestions in dealing with staff issues. Just as we are in the "business" of re-training others for new jobs, we need to "re-tool" our professional staff in a slightly different way.

1. Staff development - Send professional staff to conferences both in the state and national - not conferences in their professional area but ones to give them an overview and broader exposure to the community colleges and student services in general.

2. Begin to develop young staff to replace those nearing retirement. Invest in a staff for the 2000s, this includes recruiting new staff and mentoring current staff.

3. Supervisor/Dean or VP - help staff to find an area of expertise and hold them accountable for it - such as designate a counselor responsible for articulation. That person would provide updates to others, handle publications and provide resource material to other staff as needed and would be liaison outside the institution. As information is becoming more and more specific and constantly changing, to expect all staff to be expert in all areas is impossible. This also provides clear job expectations and standards for staff members.

I will sketch brief suggestions for the specific areas of financial aid, student activities and placement and have already mentioned counseling issues in terms of staff.

Financial Aid - Two types of education need to be done in this area.

1. Aid could be explained to students in simpler, easy-to-understand terms in publications. Often it is very confusing to the most savvy student yet alone a student brand new to the college.

2. There is also an internal education within the institution that needs to be done. There seems to be a discrepancy between some staff outside of financial aid and financial aid officers. Officers feel that there is not a "glut" of aid available and that it is not as easy to qualify or find the necessary amount of aid to cover costs such as books, child care, etc. Others promote the idea that aid is available if we just let students become more aware of it.

Student Activities

There are different philosophies concerning student activities for adult learners. On the one hand some feel that their students do not have time for such programs - on the other hand - some use it as a device to interest the community in the college and/or provide activities for traditional students.

Astin's Involvement Theory states that the more different ways in which a student is involved at an institution in various activities, work study, classes, the more likely a student is to remain.

In addition to serving as a retention tool activities can also serve to market the institution to the community at large by bringing them on compus for car shows, health days, plays, etc.

Granted, success may depend on geographical location and the wealth of other activities in the area. It takes a careful needs assessment and the willingness to experiment to develop an activities program.

Placement

One of the least fully developed activities for adult learner needs especially in community colleges is the placement function. Areas such as cooperative education, internship opportunities and placement upon degree or program completion or retraining can be areas of growth or development. Currently this function is done halfway at most institutions. There needs to be an investment or reduction based on the willingness of an institution to commit adequate resources to the area.

Conclusion

I briefly outlined some concerns in student services that I have found in my campus visits and from talks with the staff during my research. However I believe that the future is bright for student services. I described what some institutions are very creatively doing, now we need to share those ideas with others.